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David Bradley Cheek

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USE OF REBELLION AGAINST COERCION AS MECHANISM FOR HYPNOTIC TRANCE DEEPENING

DAVID BRADLEY CHEEK

The hypnotic state is usually more pleasant than the normal awake state. When the hypnotized subject is warned that he will soon be expected to awaken he will often drop into a deeper level just before awakening.

Most hypnotic subjects will respond at their best capacity if suggestions are given in a permissive way unless the situation is critical and comparable to that of combat where life may depend upon immediate acceptance of orders given by a superior officer.

While teaching the techniques of hypnosis induction and trance deepening the writer has been impressed by the indications given by hypnotized students that they have reached their deepest level just after receiving the suggestion that the session would end. Before the present experiment was set up the observations were made with a Chevreuil pendulum as the indicator.

The student was asked to hold the chain of the pendulum between pointer finger and thumb with eyes closed. The statement was made to the subject as well as the two or three students in the group that the subconscious knows what hypnosis feels like, even when there has been no formal exposure to hypnosis. I state that I am going to ask the subconscious of the subject to force the fingers apart when he is in hypnosis deeply enough for him to shut out all sounds except my voice. I point out that the ball will then fall to the floor without disturbing him.

Some form of induction technique is then presented in order that the students might shape their practice session along parallel lines. Some subjects drop the ball during induction. Others hold it till the end. A few hold on till the suggestion, "In a few moments I will count from ten down to zero. As I count I would like to have you gradually awaken until at the count of zero you are wide awake, comfortable, and relaxed."

A large proportion of those who continue to hold the chain until this time relax their grip and drop the ball shortly after the direction had been stated or after the counting has started. The dropping of the ball seems to symbolize achievement of a greater depth.

There are two reasonable possibilities of explanation here. One would be that there had been a gradual deepening of the hypnotic state which

happened accidentally to coincide with the command to awaken. Another would be that the signal to awaken had brought about a deepening of the level.

LeCron and Bordeaux (5) have pointed out that there may be an accurate perception of the depth of hypnosis on an unconscious level. There seems to be a reasonable basis of clinical evidence to support this hypothesis. Thus, by utilizing the ideomotor response of finger movement, it was felt that some clarification of the "ball dropping" phenomenon might be obtained.

Toward this end the subjects could help by giving two distinct signals. A movement of the right pointer finger could give a constantly readable indication of depth similar to the alcohol weather thermometer and a single flick of the left pointer finger could be given when the subject recognized his maximum depth for the day comparable to the maximum reading clinical thermometer. The right arm is placed in such a position that the index finger can move down as well as up. The subject is asked to lift this finger progressively as the trance is deepened and lower it progressively as the trance decreases toward the awake state. The left index finger is to lift momentarily when the impression of greatest depth is perceived.

As a further check upon the mechanism of trance deepening, the subjects were asked after awakening when they thought they were deepest and what they thought made them go deeper.

Material

Ten successive gynecological patients without previous training in hypnosis have been chosen for the experiment of evaluating depth level with finger signals. Their ages ranged from 22 to 54. Hypnosis was presented to them as a means of improving tolerance for conditioned pain and for helping uncover psychic factors in various gynecological and urological complaints. Except in the case of teaching professional men and women, the writer feels that hypnosis should be used only when there is a real need recognized by the subject as well as the therapist (2). The mechanics of hypnotic suggestion are explained to my patients as being adaptive processes serving the purpose of mobilizing defense mechanisms similar to responses found throughout the animal kingdom (3). My patients if interested then listen to a 15-minute tape recording which explains hypnosis further as being a state of improved concentration enabling the subject to use effectively the tremendous ability of the brain to alter physiological processes in a beneficial way. At the conclusion of the tape, the patient is given an example of an induction with

the recommendation that she listen to it objectively just in order that she may see how simple, familiar words are used to call upon memories of places associated with peace, quiet and relaxation. Toward the end of this example is the suggestion that she might be interested in noticing how she can alter the sensation in the left arm by pretending she has been lying on it for a long time and remembering how it might feel if it were numb in this way.

If the subject states her interest in learning more about hypnosis, she is run through the following graded steps of learning:

1. Standing postural suggestions of falling backward or being pulled over laterally by a "heavy suitcase" held in one hand. Eyes closed.

2. Sitting with eyes closed and arms extended parallel and at shoulder height—suggestions given that a heavy weight is hanging on the wrist of one arm.

3. After a rest period and explanation of what has happened so far, the subject is again asked to hold her arms extended while an imaginary string on one wrist pulls the arm over toward me. When the arm is about 45 degrees away from its original position the suggestion is given that she try to pull that arm back to its original position. Resistance is felt because of the overlay of my earlier suggestion upon the weaker autosuggestion of the subject. After she smiles in recognition of the resistance to "trying" she is asked to become the hypnotist and remember how her wrists might feel if they were being pulled together by a strong rubber band stretched between her arms. She is instructed that she can "cut" my string and that she will notice the response improving as she repeats the thought, "my arms are pulling together."

With this sequence of tests and demonstration of personal achievement, the stage is set for hypnosis induction. Any technique would suffice as further experience has shown, but for the purpose of standardizing the present group management, I asked each subject what sort of place she would like to remember. It was explained that I would like to know whether she would be most relaxed in the mountains, near a river, in a forest, or on the beach. The patient was in this way allowed to start her own induction by answering questions with autosuggestive content. Then she was asked to close her eyes and visualize that place. Additional relaxing suggestions were given during three or four minutes. The right arm is then moved by the operator to a vertical position resting with the elbow flexed on the arm of the chair.

Now the suggestion is given that the right forefinger will be moved by the subconscious in an upward direction if the depth of the trance is increased and the finger will lower if the level is decreased. Another

suggestion is given that the left forefinger will raise momentarily if the subconscious senses at any time that the level is greater than any previously experienced that day.

After continuing with suggestions that the hypnotic state would be deepened as the operator goes on talking a lapse of approximately 30 seconds was allowed to watch for the signal of increasing depth. In none of the ten cases did this occur. The suggestion was then given: "In a few moments I will count from ten down to zero and I would like to have you awaken feeling comfortable, relaxed and refreshed." Another pause of 30 seconds was allowed and then the reverse count started with intervals of 20 seconds between each of the first three counts.

Results

Two subjects signalled with the left forefinger that the maximum depth had been reached just after the suggestion of impending reverse count had been given. The other eight gave the signal between the beginning of the count and the count of five. The right index finger was appropriately elevated at the same time.

Discussion

There may be three factors accounting for this drop to a greater level after the suggestion for awakening has been given. Erik Wright has pointed out (6) that the signal to awaken may afford relief from the fear the subject may have had of being unable to awaken. This is quite possible and should be explored further. It is probably not tenable under the circumstances of the present experiment because all the patients were given a clear explanation of their controlled role in hypnosis. Their training was gradual and they had already been exposed to a tape recording which contained a sample of hypnosis induction ending.

A second factor may be motivation. All students of hypnosis and all of the patients in this experiment were interested in experiencing hypnosis. During the early part of the hypnotic session each may have been trying too hard to experience the trance state envisioned by the beginner. It could be that the suggestion of awakening came as a relief in terminating this seemingly unsuccessful effort. The greater depth reached may have resulted from relaxation of the effort to succeed and the freeing of a wish to go deeper.

A third possibility is that the hypnotic state is more pleasant than the awake one. Whenever a direction is given which will lead a person from a pleasant to a potentially less pleasant state there is a mobilization of resistance against the coercive move. This has been the explanation volunteered by physician and dentist students of hypnosis when

they were asked what they thought during the session. The usual statement has been, "When you told me to wake up I just felt I wanted to stay that way." When the subjects in this experiment were asked for their reaction, they stated that they thought they had gone deepest just about the time I had told them I would awaken them. All ten of the experimental subjects at a later session under hypnosis indicated with finger signals that it felt better to be in hypnosis and that there had been a rebellion against the command to start waking up.

Summary

Observation that student subjects often go into a deeper level of hypnosis after suggestions have been given for ending the session has led the writer to explore the reactions of subjects to this phenomenon and to set up a simple experiment using ideomotor responses in ten gynecological patients who needed hypnosis for therapy. In each of the ten patients there was a deepening of the trance after the suggestion to awaken had been given. It was the opinion of the subjects that they deepened the trance in rebellion against the direction for terminating a pleasant experience.

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